Voter Mobilization Drive

Primary Content Area: US Government/US History

Introduction

Americans have an excellent opportunity to hold politicians accountable to the needs and desires of citizens on a regular basis. It is the opportunity and power to vote. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of Americans exercises this precious right. Indeed, without thoughtful, engaged citizens who are prepared to exercise their most basic right and privilege, a democracy is not viable. Why don’t more Americans vote and how can we get more Americans to vote? This service-learning project will enable students to gain a deeper understanding of the American electoral system and deliver an important service that will sustain our democracy by mobilizing Americans to vote. Voter mobilization can take place in one of three ways: (1) Registering individuals to vote; (2) Educating voters about the issues and the candidates; and (3) Mobilizing individuals to get to polling places and actually voting. For especially energetic students or classrooms, students can sign up to become student election judges or volunteer for a political campaign provided that their participation in an election campaign is part of a classroom activity facilitated by a teacher or mediating community organization.

Project Goals

- Students will gain an understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of a two-party system.
- Students will be able to identify, define, and analyze election campaign issues from multiple perspectives.
- Students will identify candidates running for political office and conduct a comparative analysis of their positions on key campaign issues.
- Students will be able to analyze the role of the news media in the election process.
- Students will mobilize and/or educate voters to participate in primary and/or general elections for local and/or national offices.
- Students will reflect on their experience.

Procedure/Project Sequence

1. To prepare students for participation in a voter mobilization project, guide them through curricular activities that enable them to understand some or all of the following: the American system of primaries and caucuses, the benefits and drawbacks of a two-party system; the electoral process in America compared with other systems; issues that are important to young people and community members; the differences in the positions of candidates; and the role of the news media in the election process. You can go to www.pbslearningmedia.org/search/?q=elections&selected_facets for excellent curricular resources to explore these topics.

2. Have your students brainstorm and then conduct initial research on the issues and the issues that the candidates are talking about. Is there a connection between the issues that your students care most about and what the candidates are discussing or are saying in the media? Why or why not?

3. Have your students conduct a survey of community and family members. Gather data in two areas: (1) Which issues do individuals in the community care about? (2) What are the reasons that people do or do not vote? Gather the data and graph it to gain a visual understanding of the issues people feel are important and reasons for voting/not voting. Check with your students to see if these issues are the same as or different from what they care about.

4. If you want to conduct a voter education campaign, ask your students to identify who and how they will educate about upcoming issues and candidates in the election. Brainstorm with your
students a set of issues that they and other community members have found to be important. Now divide your students into groups. Have each group conduct research about one candidate running for office and where that candidate stands on the issues.

5. The information should be compiled into a user friendly document or brochure that can be delivered to voters at election time.

6. Alternatively, work with your students to conduct an effective voter mobilization project. What will be the most effective strategy to get people in the community out to vote? (Contact one of the organizations listed below for information and support on a voter mobilization effort.) This could include gathering pledges from registered voters, conducting a door knocking campaign on the day of the election, passing out voter education pamphlets, etc.

7. Conduct a reflection session with your students. You may want to focus your reflection on the following questions: What did we learn about the benefits and drawbacks of the American electoral system? Is it important to have viable third parties in this country? Why or why not? Write letters to political candidates and the media informing them of the reasons that people vote and the issues that are important to young people and other community residents. Conduct research on the election process. What might make voting more accessible to young people and community residents?

8. Extend the reflection by evaluating your work together: What did we accomplish with this project? What went well? What could have gone better? What else could be done about this problem?

**Community Partners/Resources**

- **Operation Rainbow P.U.S.H.**
  930 East 50th Street, Chicago, Illinois
  773/758-6555, [www.rainbowpush.org](http://www.rainbowpush.org)

- **Project Vote Smart**
  http://votesmart.org/

- **League of Women Voters of Chicago**
  332 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 1150
  Chicago, Illinois 60604
  [www.lwvchicago.org](http://www.lwvchicago.org)

- **Get Out The Vote Resource Center**
  http://neworganizing.com/content/page/gotv

- **Mikva Challenge**
  332 S. Michigan Ave. Suite 400
  Chicago, IL 60601
  312/863-6340

- **Chicago Votes**
  348 N. Ashland Suite 2C
  Chicago, IL 60607
  773/ 270 3214
  [http://chicagovotes.com](http://chicagovotes.com)

**Addendum**

This project addresses the following Common Core Standards and Social Emotional Standards

CC.K-12.R.R.1 Key Ideas and Details: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CC.K-12.W.R.7 Research to Build and Present Knowledge: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CC.K-12.SL.1 Comprehension and Collaboration: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CC.K-12.SL.5 Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
Goal 3: Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.
A: Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions.
3A.4b. Evaluate how social norms and the expectations of authority influence personal decisions and actions.
C. Contribute to the well-being of one’s school and community
3C.4b. Plan, implement, and evaluate one’s participation in a group effort to contribute to one’s local community.

**Duration**
Students should spend 10-17 hours on this project depending on their level of participation in a voter mobilization effort. Hours can be broken down into the following categories:

**Preparation:** Issue and Candidate Research/Survey and Analysis – 4-6 hours
**Action:** Voter Education Guide/Voter Mobilization or Registration Efforts – 4-8 hours
**Reflection:** Writing letters/Discussion – 2-3 hours

**Cross-Curricular Connection:** Connections with Journalism and Technology/Graphic Design courses could be made during this project.